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Lucidity, modernity: Mallarmé, Morisot and Zola

Susan Harrow

The everyday equivalences of ‘lucidity’ – ready clarity and untroubled intelligibility – are antithetical to the exploratory values informing aesthetic modernity in the age of Manet. It was precisely the lack of (commonplace) lucidity in modernist aesthetic practice that mobilized conservative establishment reaction in the mid to late nineteenth century. Manet’s art drew charges of unfathomability and illegibility: the reception of *Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe* at the Salon des Refusés in 1863, following its rejection by the jury of the official Salon, was outraged and baffled in equal measure.¹ Mallarmé’s late poetry was perceived as hermetic and opaque: his *Un coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard* (1897) was judged the work of a ‘maître mystificateur qui se joue [des] intelligences’ (*L’Indépendance belge*, 11 May 1897) [a master of mystification who toys with our intelligence]; and Jules Renard opined ‘Mallarmé [est] intraduisible, même en français’ (*Journal*, 1 March, 1898) [Mallarmé [is] untranslatable, even into French].² Zola’s fiction was declared, by the critical rear-guard, to be morally muddled and stylistically mired, and to represent a negation of aesthetic and ethical lucidity: in 1868 Louis Ulbach aligned *Thérèse Raquin* with ‘toutes les putridités de la littérature’ [every barrel-scraping example of putrid literature]; in 1873 Barbey d’Aurevilly blasted *Le Ventre de Paris* (‘ce livre de haute graisse’ [this grease-saturated book]); and, in 1887, the signatories of the ‘Manifeste des Cinq’ massed against *La Terre* proclaimed: ‘on se croirait devant un recueil de scatologie: le Maître est descendu au fond de l’immondice’ [it is as if one is reading an anthology of scatological texts : our Master has plunged into the depths of filth].³

In the discourse of institutional reception, ‘lucidity’ (stylistic readerliness and moral clarity) is rallied against the precepts and practices of aesthetic modernity, as the State’s case against Flaubert over *Madame Bovary* (1857) demonstrates.⁴ Yet, ‘lucidity’, explored in a *counter-discursive* context, is a key concept-term in the critical reception of literary and visual innovation since the later nineteenth century, though its intermedial scope is largely untested. Lucidity evokes the energy that lights up moments of modernist textual or visual self-awareness; it illuminates the conjunction of consciousness and conscience for writer, artist, reader, and viewer in the wake of Baudelaire and Manet. ‘Lucidity’ mediates post-Romantic incisiveness and insight, analysis and irony, impersonality and scepticism. I want to test how ‘lucidity’ (and, in French, cognates of *lucidité* like *netteté*) might help us travel more flexibly and more productively across conventionally ‘settled’ boundaries of medium and aesthetic. My concern is with three creative forces in Manet’s orbit: Mallarmé, Morisot and Zola. I begin by tracking counter-discursive lucidity as a shared value in modern narrative, painting and poetry of the later nineteenth century, plotting its presence in critical thought and reception, both contemporary and more recent. I then draw this proposition through the prism of Zola’s *Une page d’amour* (1878).⁵ A less widely known novel of the *Rougon-Macquart* series, *Une page d’amour* is an important crossing-point of literary and pictorial concerns; it is a novel which, in ways as yet unexplored by critics, connects the art of Zola to that of Morisot and of Mallarmé.

I begin with Manet himself, a formative influence in the thought and the practice of Mallarmé, Morisot and Zola. The reception of Manet in the modern and late-modern period – traced here, selectively, through the reflections of Mallarmé, Bataille and Jeff Wall – illustrates the deployment of the concept-term ‘lucidity’ (‘lucidité’) and its cognates in the appraisal of modern art by the critical vanguard.

For Mallarmé in 1876, exploring the modern turn in aesthetics in his article ‘The Impressionists and Edouard Manet’, lucidity and light are synonymous with the painter’s modernist genius.⁶ Mallarmé’s discursive choices turn around values of luminosity and illumination, linked to clear-eyed practice, conceptual rigour and an audaciously prospective vision of art. Central to Mallarmé’s article is the exploration of Manet’s controversial *Le Linge* (1875), a painting whose subject-matter is close to the domestic world of *Une page d’amour* and to Morisot’s painting of the everyday lives of women and children, and whose subversive modernist treatment turns upon the quick, fresh depiction of eruptive nature and the breakdown of normative categories of human subject and setting. Mallarmé’s purpose is to expose modernist *étrangeté* in the transformative capacity of light to dissolve boundaries and cause one object to melt into another, and thus articulate something of the penetrative power of aesthetic lucidity.

In his 1955 monograph *Manet, étude biographique et critique*, Georges Bataille evokes the rupture in the arts produced by Manet, and figures the advent of modernist audacity as a luminous inauguration: ‘la manière de trancher [le lien qui rattachait l’existence aux mensonges de l’éloquence] est désormais dans la pleine lumière’ (OC, IX, 142-43) [the fullest light is now shed on how [the cord between existence and the eloquent falsehoods that once surrounded it] is cut].⁷ Appraising *L’Exécution de Maximilien* (1867), Bataille evokes Manet’s modernity in terms of lucidity and clarity, linked to values of impersonality and indifference: ‘la netteté moderne – l’abolition des sentiments convenus, le silence – est faite de son côté d’une violence intérieure, qui est son essence’ (OC, IX, 134) [modern clarity – the abolition of conventional sentiments, the embrace of silence – is founded on an inner violence that is its essence]. Bataille reflects on the luminous quality of *Le Balcon* (1868) and specifically Manet’s treatment of his fellow painter (and future sister-in-law) Berthe Morisot. The penetrating lucidity of Manet’s vision is defined by the abstraction of self, and by abstraction *point*. Bataille focuses on the illumination in the face of Morisot, valorized by the impersonal treatment of the other two figures on the balcony, and conjures in words Manet’s transformative vision: ‘l’atonie [des deux autres figures] sert d’écrin neutre au joyau qu’est le visage de Berthe Morisot, que de l’intérieur illuminent les ardeurs de l’art et de la beauté. [...] la Berthe Morisot du *Balcon* se révèle, inattendue, calme comme une étoile entre les nuages noirs’ (OC, IX, 163) [the insipidness [of the other two figures] serves as a neutral support to the jewel that is the face of Berthe Morisot, which is lit on the inside by the ardent values of art and beauty].⁸

The contemporary Canadian artist, photographer and culture critic Jeff Wall relates Manet’s engagement with aesthetic values of rupture and fracture to the dislocations of wider social and cultural structures. At the centre of Wall’s assessment of the painter is the concept of ‘cultural lucidity’ defined by the intentional probing of the tensions between modernism’s disjunctive momentum and the agonistic treatment of traditional ideals of (corporeal) integrity:

cultural lucidity is, in Manet's example, rooted in a historical process in which the ancient concept of the harmony and unity of the body and its space is destroyed by society and reconstituted by the artist in a 'ruined' state in which its historically negated outmoded character and meaning become perceptible.⁹

Manet is defended first by Zola, whose prospective vision is proclaimed by Mallarmé: '[Zola] reconnut la lumière qui venait de se lever' [[Zola] recognized the light which had risen].¹⁰ Morisot is championed by Mallarmé and by Manet, and admired by Zola. Manet is a formative and unifying figure for all three: his portraits of Morisot, Zola and Mallarmé recognize and celebrate their distinct and related participation in aesthetic and cultural modernization.¹¹ Notwithstanding twenty-first-century concerns with interdisciplinarity and interart values, the theory and practice of Mallarmé, the pioneering modernist contribution of Morisot, and the aesthetic values of the Zola continue to be treated in isolation. This is the legacy of conventional and constrained histories that have distinguished the three in terms of their reputations for hermeticism and difficulty (Mallarmé), for Impressionism's feminine (domestic) variant (Morisot), and for the Naturalist inflection of hypertrophic realism (Zola). Whilst Mallarmé is perceived to project forwards in time, anticipating high modernism, abstraction and post-modernism, Zola is identified with the perpetuation, in another variant, of the dominant mimetic mode of realism. For most of the century following her death in 1895, Morisot was viewed primarily as a decorative painter of the domestic(ated) and familial spaces of Impressionism, at least in the traditional critical frames that feminist revisionist art history has sought to challenge since the late 1980s.¹²

In preparing the terrain for an intermedial reading of *Une page d'amour* through lucidity, it is helpful initially to explore the inscription of this concept-term in several key instances in the critical reception of Mallarmé, Morisot and Zola.

For Henri de Régnier, reviewing Mallarmé's 'Pages' in 1891, the poet's 'lucidité supérieure' captures a sensibility that deploys irony to expose hypocrisy. Reviewing Mallarmé's *Vers et prose* in 1893, the poet and Gauguin scholar Achille Delaroche allies ideas of supreme, representative lucidity with intellection ('Mallarmé est l'esprit le plus lucide de ce temps' [Mallarmé is the most lucid mind of our age]), and relates cerebral and ethical values ('[il est] la conscience même de la poésie' [[he is] the very conscience [consciousness] of poetry)).¹³ Fifty years later, Maurice Blanchot in *Faux Pas* (1943) foregrounds Mallarmé's inaugurating momentum, his anticipation of postmodern positions, and his probing of troubled lucidity ('netteté désespérée', *Faux Pas*, p.119 [desperate lucidity]).¹⁴ Blanchot privileges the depth and incisiveness of Mallarmé's self-reflexivity: 'cet esprit si lucide, si contraire aux hasards et aux ombres, s'était en lui-même énoncé tout entier, s'était dit et s'était vu complètement' (*Faux Pas*, p.125) [this supremely lucid mind, so resistant to chance and to darkness, had spoken fully to itself, within itself, and had envisioned itself utterly]. For Blanchot, Mallarmean lucidity captures thought as it moves through language, revealing 'un système cristallin d'où toute facilité est exclue et qui ordonne les mots selon des rapports nouveaux, par un effort de réflexion, de recherches, de pressentiments rigoureux' (*Faux Pas*, pp. 118-19) [a crystalline system that excludes the facile and orders words according to new relationships through processes of reflection, research and rigorous prospection].

Sartre, in *Mallarmé: La Lucidité et sa face d'ombre* (1952), evokes the poet's lucidity in its cool detachment and its deconstructive energy.¹⁵ Like Blanchot, Sartre foregrounds Mallarmé's coruscating self-reflexivity, but he also discerns in Mallarmé's critical consciousness a lucid corrective to determinist despair:

Il fut tout entier poète, tout entier *engagé dans la destruction critique de la Poésie par elle-même* ; et en même temps, il restait dehors ; *sylphe des froids plafonds*, il se regarde : si la matière produit la pensée, peut-être *la pensée lucide de la matière échappe au déterminisme*. (my emphasis)

[He was an absolute poet, absolutely *engaged in the critical destruction of Poetry by itself*; and, at the same time, he remained on the outside; *the sylph of glacial ceilings*, he contemplates himself: if matter produces thought, perhaps *the lucid thinking around matter is a means of escaping determinism*.] [my emphasis]

In late-twentieth-century critical thought Mallarmé emerges as the 'philosopher's poet' (and, also, as philosopher-poet), and in this context 'lucidité' as a concept-term makes a strong appearance. In *Mallarmé: Politique de la sirène* (1996), Jacques Rancière seizes the transcultural and ethical clarity of Mallarmé's thought: 'sur les rapports que son temps nouait entre la politique, l'économie, l'art et la religion, Mallarmé a été un témoin et un analyste dont la lucidité ne trouve guère de répondant chez les professionnels de la pensée' [in terms of the links that his era created between politics, economics, art, and religion, Mallarmé was a witness and an analyst whose lucidity can scarcely be matched by professionals in the art of critical thought].¹⁶

Berthe Morisot plays a central role in the relations between painters and writers around Mallarmé (and, to a lesser extent, around Zola), but the interart significance of her work remains, to this day, underexposed in scholarship. With few exceptions, experimental values in nineteenth-century cultural creativity are identified and historicized as masculine. Yet, from the First Impressionist Exhibition in 1874, Morisot exhibited alongside the other *refusés* and her contribution to the modern aesthetic was recognized by her peers, notably Manet, Mallarmé and Zola, and also Monet and Renoir.¹⁷ Paul Mantz, writing in *Le Temps* (21 April 1877), acclaimed Morisot as an exceptional modernist painter: 'Dans ce groupe de révolutionnaires, il n'y a qu'un seul impressionniste et c'est mademoiselle Berthe Morisot'. Félix Fénéon, reviewing the eighth Impressionist Exhibition (1886), echoed the contemporary critical obsession with 'le charme féminin' but openly – and importantly – admired '[la] facture large, claire, alerte' [the generous, light, percipient style] of Morisot's work and acknowledged its affirmation of 'des valeurs d'une justesse rigoureuse' [rigorously precise values], articulating its 'lucidity' value.¹⁸

Zola makes an early, positive response to the work of Morisot. In *Mon Salon* (1868) he admires the landscapes exhibited at the 1868 Salon by Berthe and her sister Edma:

Il y a, dans ces toiles, une fraîcheur et une naïveté d'impression qui m'ont un peu reposé des habiletés mesquines, si goûtées de la foule. Les artistes [Berthe et Edma Morisot] ont dû peindre ces études-là en toute *conscience*, avec un grand

désir de rendre ce qu'elles voyaient. Cela a suffi pour donner à leurs œuvres un intérêt que n'offrent pas bien des grands tableaux de ma connaissance.¹⁹ (my emphasis)

[In these paintings there is a freshness and an impressionist innocence that I found refreshing after those chocolate-box images that the crowd so loves. The artists [Berthe and Edma Morisot] must have painted these studies in full consciousness, motivated by the desire to capture what they observed. That was enough to ensure that these works are interesting in a way that many great paintings that I am familiar with fail to be.]

Zola's positive freighting of 'naïveté d'impression' suggests the spontaneity and directness, the immediacy and clarity of Morisot's art, in contrast with the shop-worn artifices of academic painting. Zola's valorization of artistic consciousness in the pictorial transposition of empirical nature implies notions of aesthetic lucidity and creative transparency. In 1876 in *Le Message de l'Europe*, Zola evokes Berthe Morisot's 'vision féminine' in terms that disrupt the established (gendered) order of values, identifying feminine vision with a fresh transparency and energy that challenges tired institutionalized (masculinist) attitudes and practices.

Mallarmé is Morisot's most eloquent contemporary defender. In his article 'The Impressionists and Edouard Manet' (1876) the poet discerns values of modernist adventure in the light-drenched quality of Morisot's painting. In his preface to the 1896 posthumous exhibition of Morisot's work that he co-organized with Monet, Renoir and Degas, Mallarmé extols the painter's 'clairvoyance', in the literal sense of a lucid vision uncluttered by contingency and superfluity.²⁰ Morisot is, for Mallarmé, of equal talent to any of the contemporary modern masters. He breaks through the constraining 'gender' ascription of her art and connects her directly to the modern movement in painting:

son œuvre achevée, selon l'estimation des quelques grands originaux qui la comptèrent comme camarade dans la lutte, vaut à côté d'aucun produit par un d'eux, et se lie, exquisément, à l'histoire de la peinture, pendant une époque du siècle. (*Ecrits sur l'art*, p. 357)

[her completed work, in the estimation of some highly original artists who considered her one of their comrades in the struggle, is as great as any that they have produced, and connects exquisitely with the history of painting in our time.]

Mallarmé concludes by recognizing in Morisot the idea(l) of interart commitment that Sartre, in turn, will evoke relative to Mallarmé himself. As a response to Morisot's art, Mallarmé's writing reveals the imbrication of values poetic and pictorial: in supple ways it modulates the surfaces and curves of his subject's abstractive painting. The poet's intense admiration for Morisot's work turns on value of light and transparency: 'cette clarté qui traverse les murs, qui harmonise les couleurs, qui anime les formes vagues d'une vie étrange, elle sera retrouvée partout où Madame Morisot a mis sa marque personnelle' [the clarity which dances across surfaces, harmonizes colours, and imparts a strange life-force to vague shapes can be detected wherever Madame Morisot makes her

unique mark].²¹ The painter's clarity, captured in its kinetic transformability, suggests a form of creative lucidity that is the very antithesis of *lisibilité*. The poet focuses on the difficulty of reading Morisot's work, on its depth and mystery, and thus he evokes a sense of Morisot's non-recuperable quality and acknowledges her intellectual agency as a painter and a modernist.

The oscillation in the critical attention paid to Morisot's work during her life and across the period since her death is striking. Twentieth-century critical thought before the 1980s largely passed over Morisot's work, with the single, luminous exception of Paul Valéry.²² In his preface to the 1941 Morisot retrospective at the Orangerie, Valéry sheds light on the painter's final works. Developing an intermedial reflection, Valéry discerns analogies between certain paintings of Morisot and certain shorter poems of Mallarmé in the kind of move that my interart reading attempts in this essay. Valéry writes:

[ces œuvres de Morisot font] songer à certaines pièces brèves et délicieusement musicales [de Mallarmé]. [Prenons] de telle petite toile peinte au bord du lac, par temps voilé. Cela est fait de rien, un rien multiplié par l'art suprême de la touche, un rien de brume, des soupçons de cygne, prestiges d'une brosse qui frotte à peine le tissu. Cet effleurement donne tout : l'heure, le lieu, la saison, le souvenir, la promptitude qu'il confère, le grand don de réduire à l'essentiel, d'alléger à l'extrême la matière et par là de porter au plus haut point l'impression de *l'acte de l'esprit*.²³

[[these works of Morisot make one] think of certain brief and deliciously musical compositions [of Mallarmé]. [Take, for example] a small painting made at the edge of a lake veiled in mist. [The image] is made of nothing, and that nothingness is multiplied by the supreme art of touch, a *soupçon* of vapour, glimpses of swans, and the magic of a brush that barely touches the canvas. This skimming of the surface makes everything possible: time, place, season, memory, the readiness it confers, the marvellous gift of reducing everything to the essential, of making matter wondrously light, and thus capturing in the highest degree the impression of *a mental process*.]

Mallarmé's reception of Zola focuses on the modernity of the novels, on matters of style, and on reader reception. A regular interlocutor of the Naturalist novelist and art writer, Mallarmé prizes Zola's rejection of conventionalism and acknowledges his turn towards the aesthetic values of the future (again, in the seminal essay 'The Impressionists and Edouard Manet' (1876)). Also in 1876, two years before the publication of *Une page d'amour*, Mallarmé responds affirmatively to Zola's latest novel *Son Excellence Eugène Rougon*. He highlights its stylistic ambition and identifies the conjunction of incisive transparency and critical detachment that suggests a modernist quality of 'lucidité'. For the poet, Zola's writing is characterized by '[un] style rapide et transparent, impersonnel et léger comme le regard d'un moderne' [[a] quick, transparent style that is impersonal and light like the gaze of the modern artist]; the novel will appeal, Mallarmé affirms, to those critics whose perspectives are formed in a corresponding degree of lucidity.²⁴ Praising Zola's boundary-breaking experimentalism, Mallarmé acknowledges the 'admirable tentative de linguistique' [admirable linguistic project] of *L'Assommoir* and, implicitly, the *style indirect libre* audacity that is the formative feature of Zola's 'idéal moderne' (letter of 3 February 1877).²⁵

Zola speaks of his analytical intention in *Une page d'amour* in terms that suggest lucid incisiveness: 'analyser [la passion] de tout près, la toucher du doigt et la montrer' (*R-M*, II, 1610).²⁶ Responding to the novel, Mallarmé is rhapsodic: *Une page d'amour* is 'une chose magnifique [...] le type de l'œuvre littéraire moderne' (letter of 26 April 1878 to Zola) [a magnificent work [...] the very essence of a modern literary narrative].²⁷ Mallarmé's focus on the striking modernity of Zola's novel foregrounds its self-sufficiency and its simultaneity whereby the acts of writing and of reading seem to combine powerfully and 'sans interruption'. The homogeneous setting and concentrated atmosphere of the novel produce for the enthralled reader 'une vision profonde et limpide', founded on 'la lucidité de la description' and Zola's virtuoso skylines.²⁸

Literary critical and libidinal values coincide in Flaubert's experience of reading *Une page d'amour*. He writes to Zola: 'Je n'en conseillerais pas la lecture à ma fille, si j'étais mère. Malgré mon grand âge, ce roman m'a troublé et excité. On a envie d'Hélène d'une façon démesurée et on comprend très bien votre docteur' [I would not recommend this book to my daughter, if I were a mother. Despite my advanced years, this novel disturbed me and got me excited. One desires Hélène excessively and one understands only too well the doctor's feeling]²⁹ In his post-reading breathlessness ('j'ai lu tout d'une seule haleine' [I read it all in one go]), Flaubert relates the novel's quickening effect and its seductive power, a defining quality of the novel that will be explored in the study of misplaced objects and misplaced words in the second part of this essay.

In ways that build on the reader reception of Zola's two key modernist interlocutors, Mallarmé and Flaubert, Henri Mitterand has stressed the deconstructive agency of *Une page d'amour* and highlighted the reader's active role in deciphering social signs and gestures.³⁰ Underscoring the novel's erotic project and its psychoanalytical potential, Mitterand stresses the subversive power of *Une page d'amour*, the 'innocent' novel that conceals, initially, its explosive core.

Setting the concept-term 'lucidity' to work on Zola's *Une page d'amour* will allow us to explore its scope in three dimensions: interart lucidity (the staging of poetic and pictorial values); discursive lucidity (*mise en abyme*; *double entendre*); and ethical lucidity (consciousness of the constraint and desolation at the heart of the bourgeois world). My focus is on how these forms or qualities of lucidity work together in novelistic writing that presents analogical affinities with the poetics of Mallarmé and the painting of Morisot.

Illuminating interiority

Mallarmé discerns in Zola's writing '[un] art évocatoire' that relates, *inter alia*, to the poetic and visual capacity of the novelist's style: '[Zola peint] tout [...] en un prodigieux lavis' [[Zola depicts] everything [...] in a prodigious wash of colour].³¹ The rich, suggestive quality of the novel's opening sequence reveals the lucid imbrication of poetic and pictorial values. The description of the bourgeois home in Passy (Hélène Grandjean's bedroom) calls up the interior worlds of Mallarmé and Morisot through its intimations of colour, light, materiality, and atmosphere:

La **veilleuse**, dans un cornet bleuâtre, brûlait sur la cheminée, derrière **un livre**, dont l'ombre noyait toute une moitié de la chambre. C'était une calme lueur qui coupait le guéridon et la chaise longue, baignait les gros **plis** des rideaux de velours, **azurait** la glace de l'armoire de palissandre, placée entre les deux **fenêtres**. L'harmonie bourgeoise de la pièce, ce bleu des tentures, des meubles et du tapis, prenait à cette heure nocturne **une douceur vague de nuée**. Et, en face des fenêtres, du côté de **l'ombre**, le lit, également tendu de velours, faisait **une masse noire, éclairée** seulement de la **pâleur** des draps. Hélène, les mains croisées, dans sa tranquille attitude de mère et de veuve, avait un léger **souffle**. (*R-M*, II, 801) (my emphasis)

[The **nightlight**, in its blue paper shade, burned on the mantelpiece, behind **a book**, the shadow of which engulfed half of the bedroom. A peaceful light traversed the occasional table and the chaise longue, bathed the rich **folds** of the velvet curtains, and **immersed in azure light** the mirror of the rosewood cabinet that stood between the two **windows**. The sedate harmony of the room, the blue of the drapes, furniture and rug gradually took on a **gentle, cloud-like quality**. And, opposite the windows, on the **shadow-filled side**, the bed, also covered in velvet, created a dark shape that was **illuminated** only by the **pallor** of the bed linen. Hélène, with her hands clasped, embodied the serenity of a mother and a widow. Her **breathing** was gentle and soft.] [my emphasis]

The evocation of rosewood patinas, plush fabrics, the abandoned book, and the still, solitary female figure traces the material outline of an art of suggestion that is heightened by chiaroscuro effects and by the immersion in azure (the imperfective value of 'azurait' suggesting chromatic process *in process*).³² The intimation of silence and *ennui*, of desolation illuminated by the pervasive glow of the nightlight and accentuated by deep shadows, resonates with the chromatic, atmospheric and human elements of 'Brise marine' (1865) ('j'ai lu tous les livres'; 'la clarté déserte de ma lampe / Sur le vide papier que la blancheur défend' [I have read all of the books; the abandoned light of my lamp / On the empty paper that whiteness defends]). The nocturnal hush of this inaugural scene conjures up a sense of loss that echoes the 'Sonnet en -yx' ('Ses purs ongles ...') (1887) with its once opulent 'salon vide' and its subtle tracing of a feminine presence ('défunte' in Mallarmé's sonnet; 'veuve' in Zola's novel).

Mallarmé and Zola share a penchant for furniture, fabric and fashion. Where one writer draws elliptically and the other more capaciously on material culture, together they do so in ways more probing and profound than simple scene-setting. For Mallarmé, interior space and intimations of bourgeois material culture are a point of transposition into spaces of emptiness and disconsolation, and into a poetics of abstraction. In Zola's text, material referents dissolve or are subsumed in the evocation of atmosphere and unnamable affect ('une douceur vague de nuée'). Enigma and elision are inscribed by the evocation of 'une masse noire'. Thus, boundaries dissolve and mimesis momentarily loses its firmness and clear edges. In their place a modernist art of indistinctness is briefly glimpsed. Simultaneously, 'une masse noire' moves towards construction (a kind of Cézannian, post-Impressionist rigour is suggested by that dark volume). The dark or black mass sits on the edge of consciousness, provoking not words, but the slightest of corporeal tremors ('un léger souffle'), a breath that imparts rhythm to stillness. Zola's poetic effects suggest a motivation not dissimilar to Mallarmé's aspiration for an art of

suggestion ('peindre, non la chose, mais l'effet qu'elle produit' (letter to Cazalis, 30 October 1864) [painting, not the thing itself, but the effect it produces]).³³

The passage invites comparison between Zola's writing and Morisot's late art in the conjunction of thematic connotations (bourgeois feminine space) and chromatic values (paleness, whiteness, blue, azure, black). Morisot's paintings of the 1890s reveal an exploratory colourist and an adventurous practitioner of opalescence and iridescence whose chromatic brilliance hints at sombre depths, as Roger Marx affirms in *Les Femmes peintres et l'impressionnisme: Berthe Morisot* (1907):

[vers la fin de sa carrière] elle revient à la linéature accusée; la lumière s'épanouit, resplendit et ruisselle avec une intensité inconnue; le ton s'avive, et dans la *Fillette au piano*, dans le *Portrait des enfants Thomas* et dans les *Jeunes filles au jardin* (1893 et 1894), il revêt la luxuriance du rose franc, du rouge orangé, du bleu marin. Tel un flambeau projette une lueur plus forte avant de s'éteindre et de laisser place à la nuit.

[[towards the end of her career] she returned to a more pronounced line in painting; light unfolds, shines and streams with fresh intensity; tones become vivid, and in *Fillette au piano*, in *Portrait des enfants Thomas* and in *Jeunes filles au jardin* (1893 and 1894), they take on the luxuriance of a bold pink, of orangey red, and of navy blue. Like a flame that projects a light that grows stronger and stronger before becoming extinguished and giving way to darkness.]

Late Morisot is a consummate painter of blue in the articulation of beauty and affective remoteness in interior spaces. In *Marguerites* (1885) blue, suffused with white, infiltrates bowl, jug and table, and is absorbed into the depiction of the flowers. *Lucie Léon au piano* (1892) offers a compelling association of cobalt, indigo and pale blue in an audacious treatment of the young female musician engaging directly, searchingly, with her viewer. Zola's opening description in *Une page d'amour* offers an exquisite meditation on blue in the material referents of lampshade, curtains and rugs, and their dissolution in atmosphere. Descriptive *épaisseur* articulates values of material thickness, as in Morisot's depictions of bourgeois interiors, but the theme of comfort intimates, in Zola (as in Morisot), a sense of confinement and constraint. The 'œuvre intime et de demi-teinte' [an intimate work of muted tones], as Zola describes his novel in an accompanying note, reveals a strong affinity – thematic and tonal – with Morisot's bourgeois drawing rooms, bedrooms and bathrooms, conventionally gendered spaces that modernist art and literature of the later nineteenth century explore and expose. As Griselda Pollock stresses in *Vision and Difference*, female painters could not exercise the freedom enjoyed by their male counterparts to explore sites of modernity in the public arena (cafés, Folies Bergère, railway stations, brothels).³⁴ The power of circulation of bourgeois women (including female painters) is severely restricted: Zola represents that restriction, containing his narrative within the domestic, feminized spaces explored by Morisot in her work.

Lucidity and the knowing narrative

In a *mise en abyme* of Hélène Grandjean's erotic predicament, Juliette Deberle, the doctor's wife, struggles to quell her own sexual temptation, and engages in a profound interrogation of her desire at the scene of her imminent seduction: '[Juliette] n'avait qu'à fermer les yeux, elle saurait. Cette envie lui venait, et elle la discutait au fond d'elle, avec une grande lucidité' (*R-M*, II, 1017) [[Juliette] had only to close her eyes, she would know for sure. Desire came to her, and she analysed it deep within herself with great lucidity]. Through her self-analytical work, the deeper consciousness of the central character Hélène is probed and her 'trouble' exposed across the narrative. Following the mercy mission of Henri Deberle to save her stricken daughter, Jeanne, Hélène's emotions towards her doctor-neighbour are conflicted. Striking in Zola's narrative is the lucidity of the character's self-analysis: 'un matin, elle [...] rencontra [le Dr Deberle] et se cacha comme un enfant. Elle fut très contrariée ensuite de ce mouvement de timidité. Sa nature tranquille et droite protestait contre ce trouble qui entraînait dans sa vie' (*R-M*, II, 811) [one morning she [...] encountered [Dr Deberle] and she hid from him as a child might. She was most annoyed at herself for reacting in this shy manner. Her quiet, upright nature was indignant at the upset that was taking hold in her life]. The narrator engages in a 'doubling' effect, exposing to the reader what the fictional character experiences on the inside and on the outside: corporeal unease, interpersonal malaise, and affective and psychic upset.

That doubling effect occurs, or recurs, across the divide between real life and fiction. Thus, Flaubert's expressed 'trouble' in the act of reading *Une page d'amour* mirrors that of the fictional Hélène as she reads Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*. Mesmerized by Scott's tale of a chivalric hero who is desired by two women (the strong Rebecca and the placid and passive Rowena), Hélène experiences readerly pleasure in the deferral of revelation: '[elle] prenait une jouissance à ne point satisfaire tout de suite sa curiosité. Le récit la gonflait d'une émotion qui l'étouffait' (*R-M*, II, 847) [[she] took pleasure in not immediately satisfying her curiosity. The story filled her with an emotion that almost smothered her]: reading historical romance prompts physical symptoms that translate an affective crisis; erotic and readerly desire is provoked by curiosity about the unfolding plot (of *Ivanhoe*) and by Hélène's acute sense of the developing plot of her own desire for the conjugally committed Henri. There is *mise en abyme* where the narratives (Hélène's own story and Rowena's story) briefly coincide as Zola's own placid protagonist merges with her Romantic fictional alter ego: 'Les yeux de nouveau levés et perdus, Hélène rêvait profondément. Elle était Lady Rowena, elle aimait avec la paix et la profondeur d'une âme noble' (*R-M*, II, 855) [with her eyes raised again and vacant, Hélène was deep in her daydream. She was Lady Rowena, she loved her hero with the serenity and the depth of feeling that only noble hearts know]. Lucidity that is formed in acts of specular self-recognition or projection is briefly displaced by hysteria as (fictional) real life and fiction (fiction within fiction) coincide. The fantasy and dream-work refracted through romantic fiction fills the space of vacancy at the centre of the materially replete social world. There is, in this, a clear affinity between Zola's correlation of female reading experience and fantasy, and Morisot's depiction of women reading in reclaimed spaces of imaginative agency (and relative autonomy) in bourgeois settings.³⁵

Zola paints an incisive portrait of the manipulative child who works to thwart her mother's desire. Jeanne's perverse intent in constraining Hélène emotionally and

erotically defines her as possessive and powerful, and is summed up in the oxymoronic pressure of the child's 'adoration tyrannique' (*R-M*, II, 816). Jeanne's wilful conjoining of the effects of her own (aggravated) nervous illness and her intense daughterly feeling is plotted as a series of eruptive gestures: 'de ses doigts convulsifs et caressants, elle [...] attirait [sa mère] par petites secousses vers la porte' (*R-M*, II, 818) [with fingers convulsive and caressing, she [...] tugged at [her mother], pulling her towards the door]; Jeanne draws Hélène towards the door that closes upon – and forecloses – erotic desire. 'Par petites secousses' [literally, *by a series of little jolts*] captures the saccadic rhythm of the narrative: the tiny jolts that shift the narrative forwards, that spur the reader's lucid response to a disruptive, erotically freighted object (material or discursive). The narrative bristles with objects out of place, and words out of place (words capable of being understood in two (semantic) contexts, *double entendre*). Verbal objects and material objects can impart a *secousse*, a little shake or tremor that is felt (physically, affectively) in intersubjective contexts by the character, by the narrator, and by the reader. An arresting instance occurs in the novel's opening scene as Henri Deberle is attending Hélène's stricken daughter in the early hours of the morning: 'Les vêtements d'Hélène avaient glissé à terre et barraient le tapis. Le docteur, ayant marché sur un corset, le ramassa pour ne plus le rencontrer sous ses pieds' (*R-M*, II, 807) [Hélène's clothes had slid to the floor and occupied the rug. The doctor, having trod on a corset, picked it up so as not to step on it again.] The erotic *frisson* imparted to haptic and visual instances in the troubled encounter of body/mind and significant object resonates in the reader, linked to the pervasive practice of *double entendre* in the dialogue between characters.

The voyeuristic, fetishistic Mère Fétu is practised in the art of suggestive discourse, as befits her role as would-be *entremetteuse* or erotic facilitator in the relations between Hélène and Henri. Drawing on her own medico-erotic experience, Fétu outlines the haptic pleasure induced by the doctor's palpations: "'Quand il vous touche, on croirait des mains de velours'" (*R-M*, II, 828) ['When he touches you, you'd think he had hands of velvet']. To speak personally is, also, to suggest vicariously the pleasure triggered by the doctor's touch. Growing increasingly adept in the art of *double entendre*, Hélène interprets the deeper implications of Henri Deberle's 'phrase banale': his "'vous ne prenez donc rien?'" ['don't you want something?'] stirs 'un grand trouble [...] une excitation' (*R-M*, II, 898) [considerable upset [...] a state of nervous excitement].

The narrator's ethical lucidity in dissecting characters' hypocrisy and cynicism exposes the latent brutality of the plot focused on the *bien-pensant* and colonizing presence of Monsieur Rambaud and his brother, Abbot Jouve, in the life of Hélène: 'c'étaient eux qui, dans les premiers temps [du] veuvage [d'Hélène], avaient forcé sa porte et mis leurs couverts' (*R-M*, II, 821, my emphasis) [it was they who, when Hélène was first widowed, had forced their way in and claimed their place at her table] [my emphasis]; boring and controlling, Rambaud 'sour[ait] en homme qui est chez lui' (*R-M*, II, 823) [smiled like a man who feels completely at home]. The deployment of intentional material referents (and their linguistic equivalents) produces intimations of constraint real or threatened. Fishing rods shackled to the carriage as Rambaud and Hélène leave Paris for their conjugal life in Marseille suggest rectitude and repression. Rambaud's 'cannes' connects with other forms of feminine containment (railings, doors, balconies, parapets) in the novel. Overwhelmed by the memory of Henri Deberle's declaration of love, Hélène is described looking out of the window: 'elle s'accouda en

face de Paris [...] les coudes frémissants sur la barre d'appui' (*R-M*, II, 902) [she leant on the window sill looking at Paris [...] her elbows trembling on the ledge]. Morisot represents female subjects defined by railings and gates that impede access or exit; and which impart a sense of dislocation and sequestration, as in her capacious *Vue de Paris depuis les hauteurs du Trocadéro* (1871-72). There is a further parallel between Zola's narrative and Morisot's *Femme et enfant au balcon* (1872) where a woman leans on railings as her young daughter (and avatar) peers through the railings as if in a cage. Manet's portrait of Morisot herself in *Le Balcon* (1868-69) invokes the railing as 'protection' and as a form of physical and symbolic stricture.

Skyscapes

The visibility of Zola's writing draws attention to its inventions and transformations, framing its methods and consolidating its evocative power. In his vivid descriptions of city scenes in his writing on art, Zola echoes the Impressionists' concern to capture the effects of shimmering light. Zola transposes their practice in *Une page d'amour* where the intensely visual quality of his writing produces a *tour de force* sequence of *tableaux* which evoke the roofs and the altering skies over Passy and the city beyond: '[la seule récréation d'Hélène] était de donner un regard au vaste horizon, au grand Paris qui déroulait devant elle la mer houleuse de ses toitures. Son coin de solitude ouvrait sur cette immensité' (*R-M*, II, 822) [[Hélène's only pastime] was to gaze towards the vast horizon, towards the great city of Paris whose swelling ocean of rooftops extended as far as the eye could see. Her small sanctuary opened onto this immense space]. In its articulation of the vastness of vision and the dilation of feminine desire, Zola's description proposes a further visual analogue to Morisot's *Vue de Paris depuis les hauteurs du Trocadéro* (1871-72) with its diminutive figures immersed in the green wash and the oceanic blue of the painting.

Mallarmé admires the novel's skyscapes, but he questions the disjunction between the story-line and Zola's powerful visualization of the Paris skies. Mallarmé may be expecting something closer to the Romantic objective correlative, but it is precisely his reading of Zola's skies through the frame of textbook realism in this respect that throws into sharp relief the modernity of Zola's style and sensibility. The disconnection of cloud formation and plot formation might be seen to turn intentionally and lucidly on an ironic deflation of the assumed romance of Paris, exposing the fracture between human desire and its physical, cultural and psychic containments. Where Mallarmé expects an objective correlative, Zola delivers an implicit ethical critique. Underscoring the anti-telic nature of Zola's cloud-writing, as Mallarmé does, reveals something of a multiple or simultaneist perspective at work in the text, as if the Mallarméan principle of randomness itself were at work.

In creating a writerly analogue of Impressionist dissolution and alteration, Zola situates his skyscapes in the foundational structure of his text. The skies over Paris provide the concluding scene of the fifth chapter in each of the five parts of the novel: thus, the structure of composition is suggestive of the structure of a tragedy or a symphony, and a further example of the 'art évocatoire' that Mallarmé discerns in Zola's writing. Qualities of order and number (e.g., the 5x5 sequencing) provide a lucid sense of architectural rigour that might be perceived as Naturalism's closest approximation to the

Mallarmean *Livre*. Structural rigour corresponds to the idea of *armature* that Mallarmé discerns in Morisot's painting *behind* the stream of impressions: 'que s'évanouissent, dispersant une caresse radieuse, idyllique, fine, poudroyante, diaprée, comme en ma mémoire, les tableaux, reste leur armature' (*Ecrits sur l'art*, 'Berthe Morisot', p. 355) [so the paintings vanish, leaving a radiant, idyllic, subtle, powdery, prismatic trail, as within my memory; all that remains is their form].

'Lucidity' is, traditionally, recuperated as a sign of *lisibilité* and conservative aesthetic values, and colonized by the critical rear-guard. Yet, as we saw in the first part of this essay, the concept-term 'lucidity', reclaimed in counter-discursive contexts, is integral to the critical evaluation of modernism by major writers and critics from the later nineteenth century to the present. Rethinking lucidity has enabled us to work between a pioneering experimentalist poet, an analytical female Impressionist painter, and a canonical, risk-taking novelist, each responsive in different but also significantly related ways to the aesthetic and ethical values of modernism. The concept-term 'lucidity', deployed on exploratory values, has enabled us to travel across later-nineteenth-century art forms alert to their aesthetic, ethical and cultural values, and to explore these values in a single work: Zola's *Une page d'amour* is revealed as a nexus of modernist interart values that traverse narrative, poetry and painting. Something of the scope of lucidity as a concept-term in the evaluation of interart innovation in the wake of Manet is thus revealed. The counter-discursive value of lucidity can help unsettle boundaries of modernism and make possible a more porous description that complicates, illuminatingly, questions of aesthetic value, genre and historiography.

Translations in the text are my own unless otherwise stated.

¹ T.J. Clark, in *The Painting of Modern Life* (Princeton UP, 1999), p. 281 (note 8), discusses the scandal of 'Olympia'. See also Michael Fried, *Manet's Modernism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), p. 297 and p. 570 (note 83). Rolf Laessøe discusses the critical reception of Manet's painting in *Artibus et historiae*, vol. 26, no. 51 (2005), pp. 195-220, including Théodore Pelloquet's assessment of the painting as an unfathomable 'rebus'.

² The first quotation comes from a longer extract which appeared in Thierry Roger's magisterial study *L'Archive du Coup de dés: Etude critique de la reception d'Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* (Thèses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2008), p. 44.

³ Ulbach ('Ferragus') published his scathing critique in *Le Figaro* (23 January 1868); Barbey d'Aurevilly launched his charge in *Le Constitutionnel* (14 July 1873); and Anatole France's review of *La Terre* appeared in *Le Temps* (28 August 1887).

⁴ See Nathaniel Wing, *The Limits of Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), chapter 3 ('Emma's Stories: Narrative, Repetition and Desire in *Madame Bovary*).

⁵ References to the novel are to Zola, *Les Rougon-Macquart*, edited by Henri Mitterand (Paris: Gallimard, 'Pléiade', 1966), and are abbreviated as *R-M*, vol. II, followed by page number(s).

⁶ *Mallarmé: Ecrits sur l'art* (Paris: Flammarion, 1998), p. 307.

⁷ References are to *Georges Bataille, Oeuvres complètes*, ed. by Denis Hollier (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), and are abbreviated as *OC*, IX, followed by page number(s).

⁸ The text of the monograph, minus the index, is reprised in *Oeuvres complètes*, IX, 103-67. References are given as *OC*, IX, followed by page number(s).

⁹ Jeff Wall, 'Unity and Fragmentation in Manet', *Selected Essays and Interviews* (New York, NY: MOMA, 2007), pp. 77-83 (pp. 81-82).

¹⁰ S. Mallarmé, 'The Impressionists and Edouard Manet', in *Ecrits sur l'art*, pp. 306-24 (p. 307).

¹¹ All three belong to a diffuse community of artists and writers linked by mutual support and conviviality (e.g., Morisot's Thursday gatherings at her rue de Villejust home; Mallarmé's *mardis* in his rue de Rome apartment; Zola's Thursdays at Médan). Morisot marries Eugène Manet, the painter's brother. Mallarmé and Morisot are close friends and regular correspondents until the artist's death in 1895.

¹² For feminist revisionist readings of Morisot, see Kathleen Adler and Tamar Garb, *Berthe Morisot* (London: Phaidon, 1987); Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference* (London: Routledge, 1988); Teri J. Edelstein (ed.) *Perspectives on Morisot* (Manchester VT: Hudson Hills, 1990); and Anne Higonnet, *Berthe Morisot's Images of Women* (Harvard UP, 1992).

¹³ *La Plume*, January 1893.

¹⁴ M. Blanchot, *Faux Pas* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943/1971) has three short texts on Mallarmé, the writer most discussed by Blanchot. Leslie Hill, 'Blanchot and Mallarmé' (*MLN*, vol. 105, no. 5, Dec. 1990), highlights Blanchot's focus on silence, the loss of being, the denial of authority, and the pursuit of transgression in Mallarmé's poetry.

¹⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *La Lucidité et sa face d'ombre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986 [posthumous publ.]), pp. 167-68.

¹⁶ Jacques Rancière, *Mallarmé: Politique de la sirène* (Paris: Hachette, 1996), p. 12. See also Yves Délégué, 'Mallarmé, les philosophes et les gestes de la philosophie', *Romantisme*, 2004, no. 124, 127-40.

¹⁷ Zola found Morisot's work intriguing. In 'Lettre de Paris' (*Le Sémaphore de Marseille*, 18 April 1874), he makes a brief, affirmative response to 'Le Berceau' and 'La Lecture'.

¹⁸ Félix Fénéon, *Les Impressionnistes en 1886* (Paris: Publications de la Vogue, 1886), p. 17.

¹⁹ *L'Événement*, 7 May 1866.

²⁰ See James Kearns, 'Recherches poétiques et modernisme pictural chez Mallarmé', in *The Turn of the Century / Le Tournant du siècle* (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1995), pp. 442-49. Kearns highlights an analogy between Mallarmé's abstraction and comparable processes of dissolution in Morisot (p. 449).

²¹ Mallarmé's writing also echoes gendered values about women's decorative art. At the same time, Mallarmé's preoccupation with Morisot's qualities as host and mother reveals a deep affinity with the exploration of hospitality and habitat, gifting and parenthood in his poetry, his art writing, his culture critique, and his correspondence.

²² Valéry discusses the powerful influence of Manet's thought and work on Mallarmé in his search for the poetic absolute, and on Zola in his quest for truth and material presence, in his 1932 essay 'Le Triomphe de Manet', in *Oeuvres de Paul Valéry*, ed. by Jean Hytier (Paris: Gallimard, 'Pléiade', 1960), II, 1326-33 (1329-31).

²³ 'Au sujet de Berthe Morisot' in *Ecrits sur l'art* (Paris: Club des Libraires de France, 1962), pp. 145-48 (p. 147) (my emphasis).

²⁴ *Stéphane Mallarmé, Correspondance complète 1862-1871*, ed. by Bertrand Marchal (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), pp. 552-54, letter of 18 March 1876 to Zola (p. 553).

²⁵ *Stéphane Mallarmé, Correspondance*, ed. by L.J. Austin, H. Mondor and J.-P. Richard (Paris: Gallimard, 1959–85), 11 vols, vol. II, p. 146. Subsequent reference is to *Corr.*, followed by volume number and page number(s).

²⁶ Writing to Flaubert on 3 January 1877, Zola announces his plan to begin work on ‘un roman de passion’ once the stage version of *L’Assommoir* is completed (in *Correspondance d’Émile Zola*, ed. by Bard H. Bakker (Montreal: Presses de l’Université de Montréal/CNRS, 1978-1995), vol. II, pp. 520-22). Later, Zola will look back on *Une page d’amour* as ‘une halte de tendresse et de douceur’ between *L’Assommoir* and *Nana* (letter to Van Santen Kolff, 8 June 1892) (p. 521, note 9).

²⁷ *Corr.*, vol II, p. 172.

²⁸ Mallarmé’s keen interest in *Une page d’amour* may have been intensified by his personal experience of early family life in Passy, emotional dislocation (due to bereavement) and family re-composition (due to remarriage). A strong inverse parallel links Mallarmé – whose mother died young and whose father remarried – and the fictional Jeanne – whose father dies young and whose mother remarries.

²⁹ *Lettres de Flaubert* (1830-1880), ed. by Louis Conard, 1926-1930; electronic edition by Danielle Girard and Yvan Leclerc (<http://flaubert.univ-rouen.fr/correspondance/conard/lettres/lettres1.html>) (accessed 1 May 2015).

³⁰ Zola, *Une page d’amour*, ed. by Henri Mitterand (Paris: Gallimard, ‘Folio’, 1989), p. 22.

³¹ From Mallarmé’s reply to Huret’s *enquête* in *Mallarmé, Oeuvres complètes*, ed. by G. Jean-Aubry and Henri Mondor (Paris: Gallimard, ‘Pléiade’, 1945), p. 871.

³² Interior design and decoration were key sites of interest of Mallarmé both as a practitioner (planning renovations, decorating rooms and painting furniture) and as a culture critic (in his letters on the 1871-72 London Exhibition, and in his magazine, *La Dernière Mode*). See Dee Reynolds, ‘Mallarmé and the Décor of Modern Life’, in *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 42:3, 2006, 268-85.

³³ *Stéphane Mallarmé, Correspondance*, I, p. 137.

³⁴ Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988).

³⁵ Kathryn Brown, *Women Readers in French Painting 1870-1890* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 212-13, identifies in realist, naturalist and impressionist art the trope of ‘portable privacy’, representations of the strategies and supports for reading that empower women in public spaces normatively associated with masculine agency.